

Introduction to Cottage Foods

Cottage Food Operators in California must specifically meet the following requirements:

- Register with the local Environmental Health Agency
- Only market cottage foods on the approved food list through either indirect and/or direct sales to consumers
- Complete a food processor training course
- Implement sanitary food preparation operations
- Create compliant labels
- Operate within established annual gross sales limit

Cottage Food Operators will also have to obtain approval from their local planning department, which might have other requirements.

Product Possibilities

Allowable products under the Cottage Food Law include:

- **Fruit butters** made with apple, apricot, grape, pear, plum, prune, quince, and combinations of these fruits
- **Fruit jellies** made with apple, apricot, blackberry, black raspberry, boysenberry, cherry, crabapple, cranberry, damson plum, dewberry, fig, gooseberry, grape, grapefruit, greengage plum, guava, loganberry, orange, peach, pineapple, plum, pomegranate, prickly pear, quince, raspberry, red current, strawberry and youngberry and combinations of these fruits
- **Fruit preserves and jams** made with the same fruits as listed above for fruit jellies, as well as pineapple, rhubarb, tomato and yellow tomato, and combinations of these fruits

Market Outlook

Cottage foods are niche products of particular interest to consumers desiring locally produced foods. Fruit butters, jams, jellies and preserves made with locally grown fruit can be sold at premium prices. They are often purchased as gifts because they have a relatively long shelf life and are brightly colored.



Planning & Production

Management Considerations

Sourcing local ingredients can be expensive. A tracking system should be implemented for all ingredients, for processed products and for products sold.

Sources for Product Ingredients (Raw Product)

California requires that all ingredients used in cottage foods must come from an “Approved Source.” Included in this are licensed commercial sellers, such as retailers and distributors. Farmers who are certified with their County Agricultural Commissioner can use their own commercially grown fruits, vegetables, nuts, herbs, and honey. Some counties have developed approved source programs for operators of community or culinary gardens who self-certify their management practices. Produce grown in backyard gardens is not allowed to be used in cottage foods.

Planning & Production (cont'd)

Food Safety

Following Food Safety Guidelines as outlined in the Cottage Food Law and taking food processor training is required for all Cottage Food Operators. Fruit butters, jams, jellies, and preserves are acid foods. However, it is still important to follow recommended times in the boiling water canner for each specific fruit and its product type.

Production

Cottage Food Operators must follow the fruit-to-sugar weight ratios specified for each specific fruit and product type in the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 21, Part 150. The quantity of standardized pectin cannot exceed 3 percent by weight of the finished food. Low sugar formulations are only allowed for fruit butters. Fruits can be frozen or canned for making jams or jellies at a more convenient time. Additions of spices and natural flavorings are allowed. However, additions of peppers, onions and other vegetables are not allowed.

Marketing

Overview

All Cottage Food Operations must be registered or permitted by the local environmental health agency before starting business. Class A Cottage Food Operators may sell goods at farmers markets, roadside stands, and Community Supported Agriculture programs directly to customers. Class B Cottage Food Operators may also sell to retailers. A Class A Cottage Food Operators will get a higher price for each product, but will also incur higher marketing costs than when selling wholesale.

Labeling

All food made by a Cottage Food Operator must be labeled properly with an approved label which states “made in a home kitchen” in 12 point type, along with a descriptive name of the product, the contact information and location of the Cottage Food Operator, the permit/registration number, an ingredient list in descending order of weight, the net quantity in English units and metric units, and a declaration of food allergens.

Allergens

Allergic reactions to fruit butters, jellies, preserves and jams are extremely rare.

Storage & Packaging

Glass jars are available in a variety of sizes, colors and shapes, but cost considerations cause most CFOs to use clear Mason jars. Their thick walls easily withstand the high temperatures of fruits cooked with sugar. The Cottage Food Law requires that jams and other preserved fruit products must be stored in the home kitchen or in a storage area attached to the home that is used exclusively for storage. Jams and other preserved fruit products should be stored in a cool, dark, dry place, between 50-70°F and consumed within a year. Over extended periods of time, changes in color, flavor, texture and nutrient content of home-canned preserved fruit products are inevitable.



Resources

U.S. FDA Code of Federal Regulations. 21CFR150:

<http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfcfr/cfrsearch.cfm?cfrpart=150>

USDA Complete Guide to Home Canning:

http://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/publications_usda.html

For more information on Cottage Foods visit:
ucanr.edu/cottagefoods